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Editorial: Vaccinate your dogs

As the Tribune's Carson Gerber reported in his story Friday, animal control officers in the area have noted a disturbing trend: So far, 43 raccoons have been captured by the Kokomo Humane Society this year infected with distemper. The disease has no cure and can be transferred between mammals quite easily. Dogs owners, in particular, are being advised to take notice.

For comparison, the Humane Society noted last year's total of raccoons captured with the virus was 10. That's a more than 400 percent increase. And the year isn't over yet.

While dog lovers should be mindful of this, the good news is vaccination more than takes care of the problem. Though there's no remedy if animals do come down with the ailment, immunization is effective.

According to Dr. Todd Cooney of the Animal Wellness Center, overdoing the vaccinations can be harmful as well.

“Dogs over 1 year old almost always have lifelong immunity to distemper,” he said. “Extra boosters do not increase immunity, but only tend to confuse the immune system, creating a state of autoimmunity, which manifests as allergies and a host of other chronic diseases.”

Here are some additional tips to help keep your furry friend safe, courtesy of the American Veterinary Medical Association:

• A series of vaccinations is administered to puppies to increase the likelihood of building immunity when the immune system has not yet fully matured.

• Avoid gaps in the immunization schedule and make sure distemper vaccinations are up to date.

• Avoid contact with infected animals and wildlife.

• Use caution when socializing puppies or unvaccinated dogs at parks, puppy classes, obedience classes, doggy day care and other places where dogs can congregate.

• Pet ferrets should be vaccinated against canine distemper using a USDA-approved ferret vaccine.